

Testimony  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Utilities, and Rail

Senate Bill 558  
Definition of Plumbing  
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Good morning. My name is Jeffrey J. Beiriger and I serve as Executive Director of the Plumbing Heating Cooling Contractors Association of Wisconsin (PHCC-WI). I am testifying today in support of SB 558.

SB 558 makes several changes to the statutory definition of plumbing included in Chapter 145. Our association has several representatives on the Plumbing Advisory Code Council which worked with the Department of Commerce to develop the suggested changes that are now part of this bill.

First, let me give you an example of how the language of the existing statute has become outdated. The existing statute defines plumbing as including "water softeners." In its day, that may have been adequate, but the reality is that a water "softener" has a specific meaning that is too narrow for continued use. SB 558 changes the definition to read "water treatment," which includes the full range of products that are used to "treat" water for

human consumption – including softening, but also including everything from iron removal, hydrogen sulfide removal, and sophisticated systems such as reverse osmosis systems which strip water of heavy metals and other potential contaminants.

It may surprise many of you to know that the plumbing industry is undergoing a significant change. While we continue to play a key role in public health and safety, the industry is playing an increasingly important role as it relates to environmental and conservation issues.

For example, we have recognized that there are other means to deal with stormwater than to send it to our sewage treatment plants or directly to our lakes and streams. The plumbing industry has stepped up to meet these challenges. If we are going to capture storm water, treat it, and use it for drinking water, however, our codes and the underlying statute must allow us to continue to perform this work. We work well and closely with the Department of Commerce on the codes, but we periodically need to work with the legislature on the underlying authority for those codes.

Another example is water conservation. Historically, plumbing has been thought of as “potable” water – water that is fit for human consumption. But the introduction of greywater systems have changed this. Greywater systems treat and reuse water before it is ultimately sent to the

sanitary sewers for treatment or to a private sewage system. Greywater is not potable, but it clearly comes from, is treated, and is returned to fixtures that are part of the plumbing system. A crossed connection between the greywater and the clear water system could result in an unsafe condition, so this work must continue to be part of the plumbing code and the responsibility of the plumbing industry. Our underlying statute needs to reflect this change.

In the end, it's simply time - time to revisit a statute that has worked well but needs a few small repairs. That's what SB 558 does. We agreed with the need for this review, participated in that process, and support SB 558 in its present form.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them.

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